

**Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing – February 17, 2022**

Testimony Regarding HB 5037

Senator Oster, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Edie Reichard and I am the Director of Sleeping Giant Day Care, a state funded Child Day Care Center (CDC) in Hamden. I am the co-chair of the State Funded Child Care Center Director's Forum, a statewide network of 102 early care and education centers serving over 4,000 infants, toddlers, and three and four year old children. These Centers were established in 1968 by state statute to provide high quality child care for low income working families in approximately 63 cities and towns in CT.

I am submitting testimony today on the Governor's proposed budget for the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). There needs to be an increase in the Early Care and Education line item. Early Childhood Centers, which include CDC, School Readiness (SR), for profit, non-profit, and home care, have been underfunded for so long that it is hard to believe we have stayed open for as long as we have. Early Childhood Centers are essential to the infrastructure of our state, as we found out during the pandemic when centers in many cities were asked to closed to stop the spread and then we were asked to reopen with less children for "essential workers" only. Then we found out that we were now "essential workers". At the same time we lacked money and necessary resources, including staff, to reopen to all those who needed our services.

The Child Day Care Centers (CDC) which is funded within the OEC's Early Care and Education line item have been chronically underfunded. It wasn't until 2020 that our funding was finally brought up to parity with the School Readiness programs that haven't seen an increase since 2015. Think about that. The minimum wage was \$9.15 in 2015. By the end of next fiscal year it will be \$15.00 and there hasn't been an increase for state funded pre-k and child care programs. We're not allowed to raise parent tuition. Parent's pay on a sliding fee scale.

I currently have several teachers with BA degrees in Early Childhood Education who are making just over \$16.00 per hour. I have an aid with a high school diploma who is making \$13.00 per hour and by 2023 will be at \$15.00 per hour and indexed after that time. I have no new revenue so I cannot afford to increase my BA staff to keep up with the increases my non-degreed staff will get due to the minimum wage increases. If I could do this I would, but with the slot rates we are currently receiving from the state we would go under.

The funds the state gave to the OEC from the federal government during the pandemic was a Band-Aid on the situation that was so bad to begin with many centers and home providers could not reopen. It did not even scrape the surface and was certainly not sustainable enough to give our staff raises. We continually make do with less and less. It is time for the legislature to stand up and make sure we are given what we truly need to run our centers and pay our staff a livable wage with real benefits! If Early Care and Education no longer exist, then who will take care of and teach CT's youngest children. The workforce in CT will dwindle and businesses will have to close. The future of Early Child Care and Education is depending on you to do the right thing by increasing the line item for the OEC. Remember we too are ESSENTIAL WORKERS!!

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.

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